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ABSTRACT

The paper presents an overview of enrollment in college-level geography courses from 1949 to 1978 and predicts enrollment trends for the near future. All data are based on the Directory of College Geography of the United States. First published in 1949, the directory lists all college and university departments offering geography, the size and status of the department, faculty professional activities, major student activity, and total number of students enrolled in geography courses. This paper focuses on specific information in the following areas: comparative data on higher education and geography enrollment from 1949-1978, introductory course enrollment, regional course enrollment, status of enrollment in quantitative courses, and acceptance of recent curricular developments such as planning courses. For each topic, information is presented on a national and a regional basis. Findings indicated that 1) geography enrollments have grown tremendously since 1949, with the greatest increase occuring from 1953 to 1963; 2) increases in geography enrollments did generally not equal the increase in university enrollments; 3) world regional geography accounts for approximately 80% of total regional course enrollments; and, 4) courses based on planning and quantification techniques are firmly entrenched within the discipline. Regarding future trends, the paper suggests that overall geography enrollments should hold their own and, possibly, increase; enrollments in regional courses are unlikely to improve much; the saturation point in quantitative enrollments is probably near; and, planning course enrollment is likely to stabilize and may decrease. (DB)

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THE PAST THIRTY YEARS OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY AS SHOWN IN THE DIRECTORY OF COLLEGE GEOGRAPHY

by

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The Directory of College Geography of the United States is indeed an institution - one which is identified with the modern period of geography and geographic education in the United States. This publication arose out of concern for the post World War II status of geography in the post secondary schools of the southeastern United States. This concern, by the Southeast Division of the Association of American Geographers, resulted in the appointment of Dr. J. R. Schwendeman, Sr. as Chairman of a committee on the status of geography by the then President of the division, Dr. Sigismond de Roy Diettrich, former head of the Department of Geography, University of Florida, Gainesville. From the first volume of the Directory in 1949, Dr. Schwendeman, Sr. compiled the data and edited the publication annually through 1966. In 1967, the home of the Directory changed from the University of Kentucky to The Geographical Studies and Research Center at Eastern Kentucky University, in Richmond, Kentucky. The job of editorship was then shared and finally shouldered by Dr. Schwendeman's son, Dr. Joseph R. Schwendeman, Jr. In 1979, Dr. Dale Monsebroten became the editor of the Directory for the Geographical Studies and Research Center, with both Dr. Schwendeman's remaining in consulting capacities.

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The Directory is the most complete, single source of data regarding educational institutions' efforts in the field of geography, listing the department offering geography, the size and status of the department, faculty professional activities, major student productivity, and the total number of students enrolled in the various courses offered by the department. This

wealth of information, published annually over the past thirty year time period, is now of immeasurable value as the composite effort permits the identification of trends, such as changes in research, educational thrust, and enrollments. This paper reflects such an effort, surveying, as it does, some aspects of geography over this thirty year period of time and identifying broad national and regional trends in selected enrollment areas.

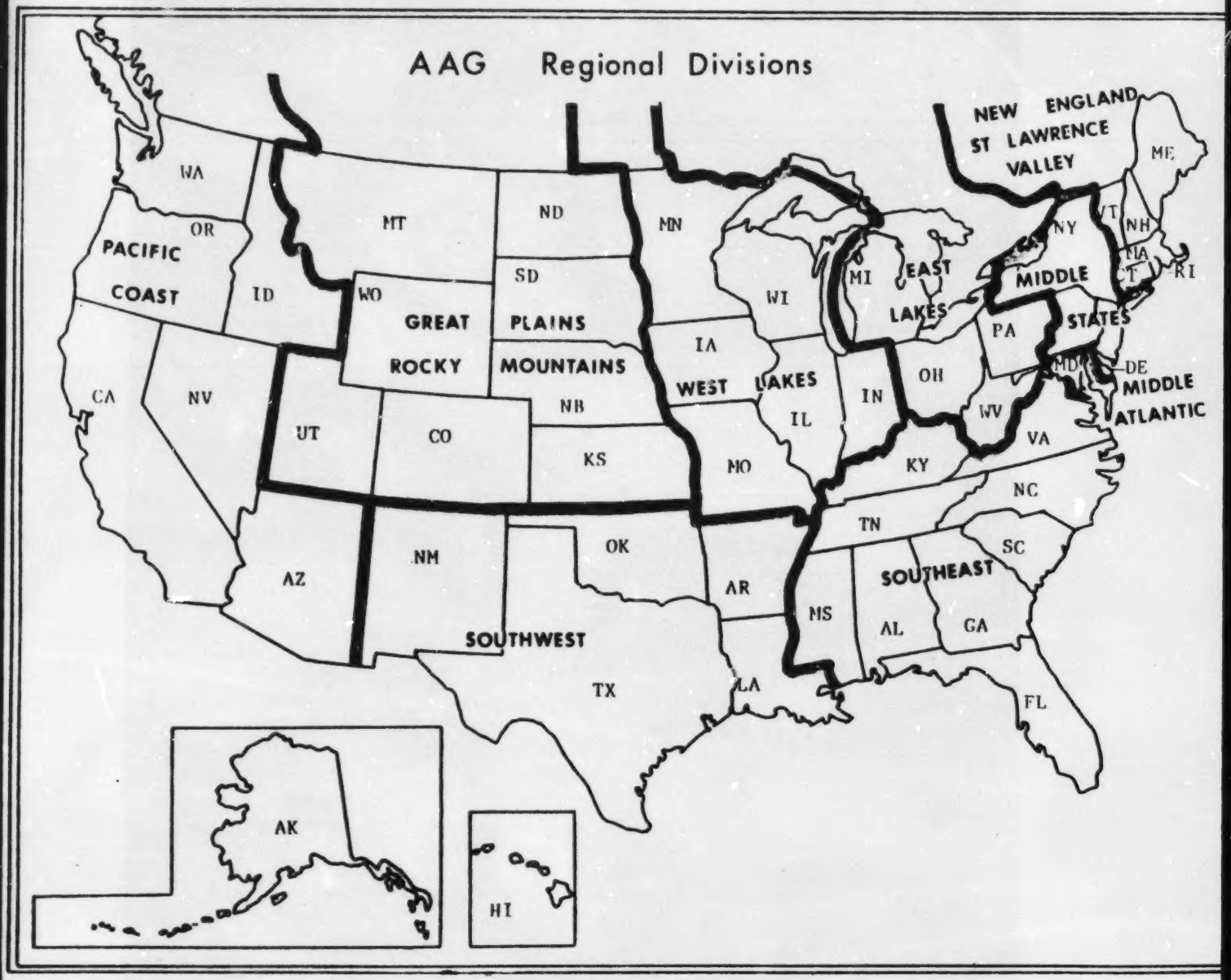
Specific information is presented covering six areas. Comparative data on enrollment in higher education and geography provide an overview of the varying fortunes of geography over the past thirty years. Introductory course enrollment is considered. Enrollments in regional courses are examined to determine what changes, if any, have occurred in a traditional subfield of geography. The status of enrollments in quantitative and planning courses are examined to illustrate the degree of acceptance of two relatively recent curricular developments.

A uniform procedure is used in the presentation of each topic. The national situation is presented first, then regional divisions of the AAG are discussed. Since data in the Directory could not conveniently be broken down to precisely fit the regional divisions of the AAG, as shown in Figure 1, a few are not accurately represented. Institutions in western Pennsylvania are included in the Middle States Division instead of in the East Lakes Division. The Upper Peninsula of Michigan is included with the remainder of the state in the East Lakes rather than with the West Lakes Division. And the northern Virginia area which is a part of the Middle Atlantic Division is included in the Southeast Division.

Both higher education and geography enrollments have grown tremendously in the past thirty years. (See Figure 2). Total enrollment in institutions of higher education increased from slightly more than 2 million in 1949 to about

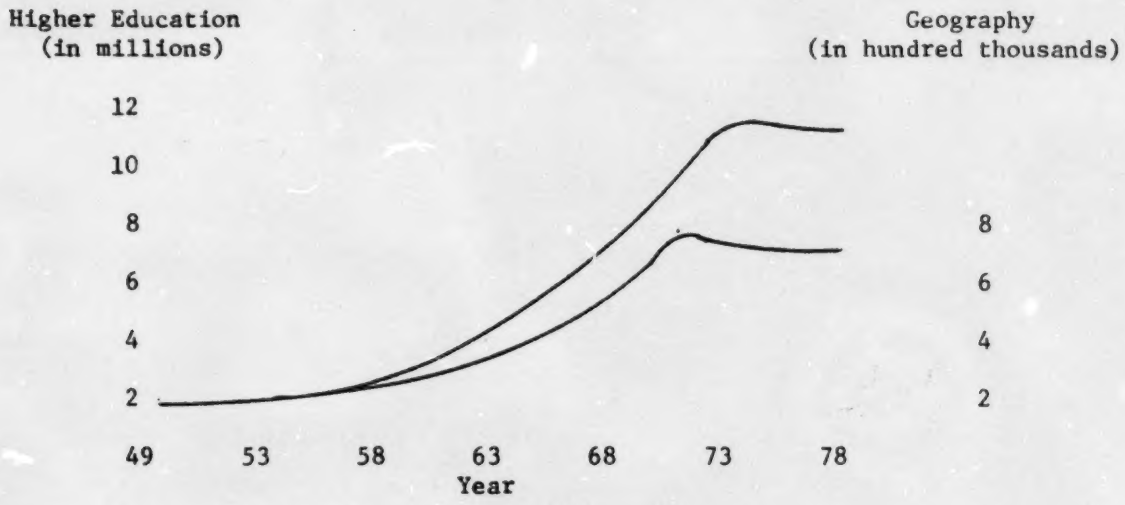
* Data on enrollments in higher education were obtained from the Statistical Abstract. U.S. Department of Commerce

FIGURE 1. AAG REGIONAL DIVISIONS



11 million in 1979. The rate of increase has varied, and there have been regional variations. There was little change in the national enrollment in higher education until 1953 after which enrollment increased at a uniform rate for the next decade. After 1963, enrollment increased at a much more rapid rate until 1970. The growth rate then became erratic, but after 1975 became relatively stable.

FIGURE 2. ENROLLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND IN GEOGRAPHY: 1949-1979



Geography enrollments were closely correlated with overall national enrollments until 1970. Yearly changes in national enrollments were accompanied by percentile changes of about the same magnitude in geography enrollments. But in 1971, for the first time in many years geography enrollments did not appreciably change and began to decrease year by year thereafter before bottoming out in 1977. The decrease during this period amounted to about 125,000 students.

What was responsible for this decrease? Those employed at universities during that hectic period are familiar with many of the reasons. Many universities underwent major internal changes in the late 60s and early 70s. Major curricular revisions were made. New departments in other disciplines came into being. Some, such as departments of social sciences competed with

geography in offering numerous courses that satisfied undergraduate social science requirements. Free electives became less numerous as departments became more specific in designating supporting courses for majors and minors. Still other reasons for the changes could undoubtedly be given.

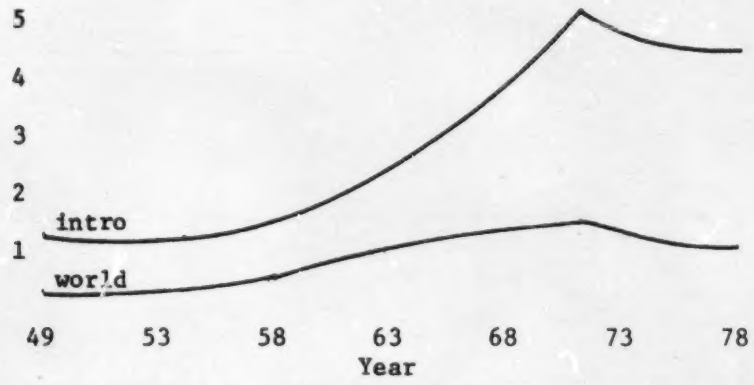
Some regional variations may be noted in the patterns of higher education enrollments. Increased enrollment in higher education was greatest in the Southeast Division and the Pacific Coast Division. Both experienced more than a 6 fold increase over the 30 years. The least change occurred in the Middle States and West Lakes divisions where university enrollments respectively doubled and tripled. The remaining divisions experienced increases of about 400 percent between 1949 and 1979.

Increases in geography enrollments were more variable and were of a lesser magnitude. Nationally, geography enrollments expanded slightly more than 3 times between 1949 and 1979. But the New England - St. Lawrence Division was the only AAG division that had an increase in geography that approximately equaled the increase in university enrollment. The Pacific Coast Division geography enrollments increased 4.64 times. The Middle States Division enrollment did not quite double. All other divisions more than doubled or tripled enrollments.

National enrollment in introductory courses has gone through four stages over the past 30 years. (See Figure 3). The first stage was a period of stable enrollment of about 125,000 students annually until 1960. During the second stage, a period of rapid growth took place between 1961 and 1971, with introductory course enrollments increasing from 140,000 to a peak of 490,000. There was a decrease of more than 90,000 students between 1971 and 1976 in the third stage. Sixty-three thousand of this number were students in the West Lakes and East Lakes divisions. The 90,000 student change accounts for about two-thirds of the decrease experienced in total geography enrollments over that

same period of time. In the fourth and final stage introductory course enrollments have remained stable at about 400,000 per year since 1976. (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. NATIONAL ENROLLMENT IN INTRODUCTORY AND REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY COURSES.



The pattern of enrollment in introductory courses for the AAG divisions exhibits the same patterns of relatively stable conditions, followed by a sharp increase till 1971, a decrease from 1971 till 1976, followed by either stable or slowly decreasing enrollments. There is one notable exception. The Southeast Division is continuing to have sharp declines in introductory course enrollments. The decline amounted to about 10,000 students between 1976 and 1979. Three other divisions have had minor decreases, while the Middle Atlantic Division has a persistent but slow record of increasing introductory geography enrollments.

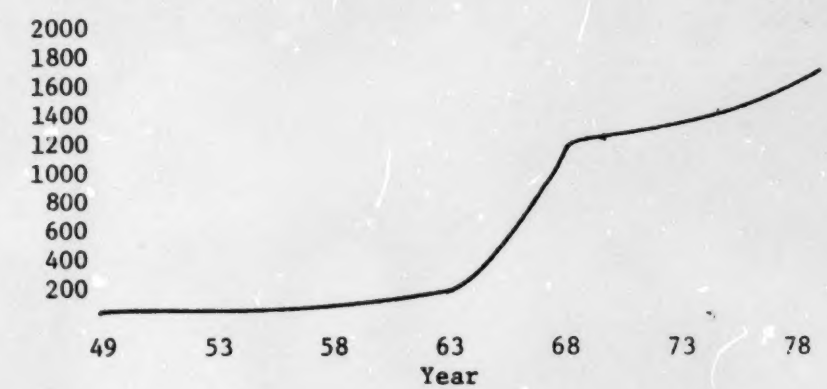
Regional geography enrollments are singularly impacted by one course. World regional geography accounts for 70 to 85 percent of total regional course enrollments. Courses on North America are most popular among the non world regional courses. Courses on the regional geography of Asia, South America, and Europe are about equal in their popularity. The relative position of world regional to other regional courses has changed. Non world regional geography enrollment formerly amounted to about 30% of the total regional enrollment but

decreased to 14 percent in 1979.

The history of regional geography enrollment for the AAG divisions is very similar to that of the introductory geography enrollment. Most divisions experienced a period of stability in the 50s, followed by sharply increasing enrollments to about 1971, and then declining enrollments in an absolute sense and in a relative sense when compared with enrollment in introductory courses.

Few departments of any size have failed to be touched by the dialogue over quantification that took place during the 1960s. Whatever ones personal feelings may be there is every indication that quantification is firmly entrenched and belongs in the geographer's kit of tools. Growth has been rapid. (See Figure 4). The national enrollment in 1961 was only 100. By 1979, over 1800 students were being trained in some type of quantitative techniques. Further, the trend through 1979 would lead us to anticipate additional increases in enrollment.

FIGURE 4. NATIONAL ENROLLMENT IN QUANTITATIVE COURSES.

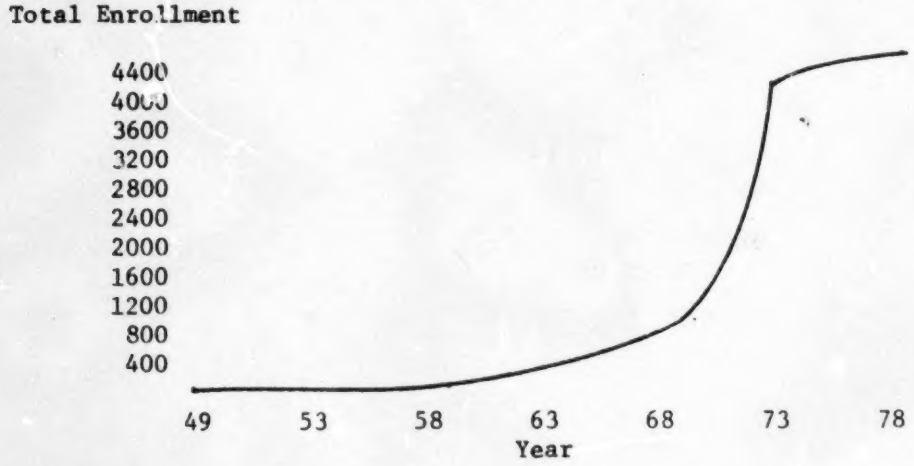


Regional divisions of the AAG have mostly experienced continual growth in enrollment in quantitative courses. Only the West Lakes Division has stabilized enrollment since 1971. The East Lakes and Pacific Coast divisions had decreases in enrollment between 1971 and 1976, but more than recovered their losses between

1976 and 1979. Only the Great Plains-Rocky Mountain Division has shown a loss from 1976 to 1979, and that amounts to only 45 students. The number of students in quantitative courses is greatest in the West Lakes, Middle States, the Pacific Coast, and Southeast divisions, and is least in the Southwest and Middle Atlantic divisions. Eight states have never reported any enrollment in quantitative courses. But it is probable that major universities in those states utilize the quantitative courses taught in other departments.

One of the major changes that has taken place within the discipline in recent years has been the introduction of courses in many departments in planning. (See Figure 5). On the basis of students enrolled, the introduction of planning courses has had a greater impact than quantitative courses. Over 4500 students were enrolled nationally in planning courses in 1979 compared to 1800 enrolled in quantitative courses. A very few planning courses were being taught in geography departments as early as 1951, but enrollments did not exceed 100 until 1961. A preciptuous climb began in 1966 that continued at about the same rate until 1976. During that period from 1961 to 1976 the number of students increased from less than 200 to more than 4200. Since 1976 enrollments in planning courses have shown signs of slowing.

FIGURE 5. NATIONAL ENROLLMENT IN PLANNING COURSES.



Three divisions have experienced declining enrollments since 1976. The Southeast Division, after experiencing the greatest growth of all divisions has had miniscule changes since 1976. The Middle Atlantic Division also has had slight enrollment changes. Rapid increases continue in the Middle State, New England-St. Lawrence Valley, and the Great Plains-Rocky Mountain Divisions.

What conclusions may be drawn from the 30 year mass of data contained in the Directory? Any conclusion stated about future trends must be regarded as "guestimates". Our crystal ball is more often than not as foggy as Kentucky River bottomland in the early morning. Keeping these qualifying remarks in mind, the following observations are offered:

1. overall geography enrollments appear to be at least holding their own and may be improving, while enrollment in higher education is stabilizing;

2. regional enrollments have stabilized, but are unlikely to improve much even if there is an upward swing in geography enrollment;

3. there will be a continued increase in quantitative enrollments for a few more years, but the saturation point is probably near;

4. and planning course enrollment is likely to stabilize and may decrease if planning organizations make acceptability for employment contingent upon credentials from an officially accredited planning department.